

Questions and Answers About Critical Habitat for the Santa Ana Sucker



Q. What is the Santa Ana sucker?

The Santa Ana sucker (*Catostomus santaannae*) is a fish native to streams in the Los Angeles Basin in southern California. The Santa Ana sucker is currently restricted to three geographically separate populations in three different stream systems in southern California: (1) the lower and middle Santa Ana River; (2) East, West, and North forks of the San Gabriel River; and (3) the lower Big Tujunga Creek.

Much like other members of the sucker family, the Santa Ana sucker has large lips and a small mouth that enables it to ‘vacuum’ algae and invertebrates from stream beds. Adult Santa Ana suckers average about 6 inches in length and have dark, blotchy backs with silvery colored undersides.

The species has lost about 75 percent of its historic habitat as a result of modifications to streams from diversions, dams, flood control features, and effects of urbanization. On April 12, 2000 the Santa Ana sucker was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. A fourth population of Santa Ana sucker in the Santa Clara River is not listed under the Act because the Service had no information available at the time the species was listed to indicate this was a native population.

Q. How many streams are included in revised critical habitat designation for the Santa Ana sucker?

The revised final designation includes approximately 8,305 acres of streams in Los Angeles County as critical habitat for the Santa Ana sucker. This designation includes portions of the San Gabriel River and Big Tujunga Creek.

All of the areas designated as critical habitat contain one or more of the primary constituent habitat elements essential to the Santa Ana sucker, although not all of these areas are known to be occupied by the Santa Ana sucker.

Q. What were the results of the draft economic analysis?

On October 1, 2004, the Service released a draft economic analysis for public review and comment. The draft analysis estimated potential impacts associated with conservation activities for the Santa Ana sucker could range from \$21.8 to \$30.5 million over the next 20 years, based on the designation of 21,198 acres of habitat in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties.

Costs of measures to avoid, minimize or offset impacts to the species from the time it was listed in 1998 to the present were estimated to be about \$4.2 million, with the bulk of these costs associated with transportation projects.

The revised final designation of 8,305 acres of essential habitat in the San Gabriel River and Big Tujunga Creek is estimated to result in annualized impacts of \$926,000.

What are the primary constituent elements essential to the Santa Ana sucker?

The Santa Ana sucker requires the following habitat components to fulfill their biological needs for population growth, feeding, sheltering, breeding, reproduction, and rearing of offspring: (1) A functioning hydrological system that experiences peaks and ebbs in the water volume throughout the year; (2) a mosaic of loose sand, gravel, cobble, and boulder substrates in a series of riffles, runs, pools and shallow sandy stream margins; (3) water depths greater than 1.2 inches and water bottom velocities of more than 0.01 feet per second; (4) non-turbid conditions or only seasonally turbid water; (5) water temperatures less than 86° Fahrenheit; and (6) stream habitat that includes algae, aquatic emergent vegetation, macroinvertebrates, and riparian vegetation.

Q. What areas were excluded from critical habitat, and why?

Some essential habitat for the Santa Ana sucker was excluded from critical habitat designation because the Service determined that the benefits of excluding the areas were greater than the benefits of including them as critical habitat.

The Service excluded essential Santa Ana sucker habitat that occurs in areas covered by the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) and areas to be covered by a programmatic consultation for the Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Program and Associated Maintenance and Operation Activities of Existing Water Facilities in the Santa Ana River. The Service has determined that these exclusions from the critical habitat designation will not result in the extinction of the Santa Ana sucker.

Based on a review of all comments and information received on the proposed rule, several stream segments included in the original designation are being excluded from the revised final rule. These excluded areas are, as follows: (1) Little Tujunga Creek; and (2) the Santa Ana River and its floodplain. These exclusions total approximately 12,864 acres.

Q. What is the effect of a critical habitat designation?

The designation of critical habitat for the Santa Ana sucker requires that Federal agencies undertaking, permitting, or funding projects to consult with the Service, if the Federal agency determines a project may affect its designated critical habitat. The purpose of the consultation is to ensure activities will not adversely modify or destroy critical habitat.

Critical habitat designation does not affect non-Federal landowners unless a project requires Federal permits or funding. In such cases, the Federal agency responsible for issuing the permit or providing the funding will consult with the Service if it determines the project may affect the species or its critical habitat.



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